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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001158

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: COR SPEAKER MASHHADANI: THE U.S. MUST BE IRAQ'S
SECURITY UMBRELLA

REF: BAGHDAD 00501

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard for 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During their March 25 meeting, new USCENTCOM Commander Admiral William J. Fallon told Iraqi Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani that security in Iraq must improve rapidly if Iraq hopes to retain U.S. domestic support. Mashhadani acknowledged the need for increased political efforts, but asserted time was needed to make reforms. He lamented that "the Washington clock runs faster than the Baghdad one," and characterized the U.S. as the "security umbrella" that provides the time necessary for the Iraqi government to reform. Mashhadani repeated his familiar criticism of Minister of Defense Abdul Qader, calling him weak with little credibility on the "Sunni street." END SUMMARY.

Mashhadani: US is the Security Umbrella

¶2. (C) On March 25, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, Admiral William J. Fallon met with Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani to discuss Iraqi security, political reform and seek his assessment of the current situation. Admiral Fallon stressed the need to reduce the level of violence in Iraq, emphasizing that rapid improvement is critical to maintaining U.S. domestic support. Mashhadani agreed, but asserted that security was a long-term issue requiring political solutions. The Iraqi government, he added, was dependent on the U.S. military's critical "security umbrella" which he said needs to remain until Iraq reformed economically, politically, and militarily. Referring to U.S. domestic pressure for troop withdrawals, he lamented that "the Washington clock runs faster than the Baghdad one."

¶3. (C) Mashhadani added that if Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (Baghdad Security Plan) is to succeed, it must address both security and economic development. He argued that PM Maliki's dependence on certain Shia political parties made it hard for him to make some difficult decisions required for genuine reform and reconciliation. Mashhadani acknowledged that his own Council of Representatives is paralyzed by sectarian divisions, as well. Nevertheless, he did not favor the immediate removal of the Maliki government, saying it was too late to "start from scratch." He asserted that Maliki needed sufficient authority to appoint a cabinet independent of sectarian parties. He could then be held accountable for his government's performance. In addition, the CoR and the various ministries must have open discourse, where each side could "sing his song" and, hopefully, resolve Iraq's internal struggles peacefully.

Threats: Iran, Al Qaida, and, Especially, Jaysh al-Mahdi

¶4. (C) Mashhadani said that he considered Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) to be Iraq's main threat. While wary of Iranian domination and Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), he argued that JAM threatened Iraq's unity as a country. Defeating JAM required the government to isolate and deprive it of resources while conducting military operations against its extremist leaders. He added that it was possible to engage much of the Jaysh al-Mahdi leadership politically because it has a clear organization. To defeat AQI, Mashhadani recommended arming what he termed "former insurgents currently in detention" to fight it. He acknowledged that a "rehabilitation" program would have to accompany such releases. Admiral Fallon replied that while this idea may have some merit, such a program would have to be done very carefully to ensure that anyone released would not return to anti-coalition insurgent activity.

Minister of Defense Is Weak and Has No Credibility

¶5. (C) Mashhadani, even though more controlled and less impassioned, continued his highly negative criticism of Iraqi Minister of Defense Abdul Qader Mohammed al-Ubadyi (reftel). While Abdul Qader may be a Sunni, he selected as a compromise candidate by the Tuwafaq Front. Mashhadani insisted that the "Sunni street hates the minister" and will not work with him. He said that Abdul Qader is weak and lacked credibility. Nevertheless, Mashhadani did not call for Abdul Qader's

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resignation, but instead said that he needed to become more effective.

Admiral Fallon: Time is Limited

¶6. (C) Fallon agreed with Mashhadani that Washington is looking for faster, near-term results from the Iraqi government. He emphasized that time was of the essence for the Sunni and Shia leadership to redouble efforts to pass key legislation important to reconciliation, especially legislation such as the deBaathification and hydrocarbon laws. He concluded by urging Mashhadani that he as well as Maliki must make the "tough decisions" ahead.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by Admiral Fallon.
CROCKER